



# Desolation Wilderness

## Eldorado National Forest

## Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit



**Welcome to Desolation Wilderness**, 63,960 acres of subalpine and alpine forest, granite peaks, and glacially-formed valleys and lakes. It is located west of Lake Tahoe and north of Highway 50 in El Dorado County. Desolation Wilderness is jointly administered by both the Eldorado National Forest and Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

This is an area where natural processes take precedent; a place where nature remains substantially unchanged by human use. You will find nature on its own terms in Desolation; there are no buildings or roads. Travel in Desolation is restricted to hikers and packstock. No motorized, mechanized, or wheeled equipment such as bicycles, motorcycles, snowmobiles, strollers or game carts are allowed. Rugged trails provide the only access, and hazards such as high stream crossings and sudden stormy weather may be encountered at any time. These are all part of a wilderness experience.

### Wilderness Permits & Zone Quotas

Because of its beauty and accessibility, Desolation Wilderness is one of the most heavily visited wilderness areas in the United States. In order to protect its unique beauty and wilderness character, human access is limited and certain activities are restricted in Desolation.

- ◆ **Permits are required year-round.**
- ◆ **Fees** for overnight camping are required year-round.
- ◆ **Day Use Permits:** Day users may obtain a free permit from one of the offices, or may issue themselves a permit at most major trailheads during the summer. Day use is not subject to fees nor limited by the quota at any time of the year.
- ◆ **Group size** is limited to 12 people per party who will be hiking or camping together. Note: group size is also dependent on the number of people allowed in the zone.
- ◆ **Overnight quota** is based upon the number of people entering the wilderness each day, and their first night's destination zone.
- ◆ **Campfires** are prohibited.
- ◆ You must **enter on the date specified on your permit** and you must spend your first night in the zone which you have chosen. The rest of your stay is not subject to zone requirements.
- ◆ **Quota Period** is from the Friday before Memorial Day through September 30.
- ◆ **Reservations:** 70% of the quota in each zone may be reserved up to 6 months in advance through [Recreation.gov](http://Recreation.gov).
- ◆ **Overnight users without reservations:** The other 30% of the available quota is set aside for first-come, first-served visitors. These permits must be obtained in person at offices which issue Desolation Wilderness permits on the day of entry and may not be reserved ahead of time. During the off-quota season there is no limit to the number of overnight users.

**Pick up permits for West side entry at the:**

**Pacific Ranger Station**, located 4 miles east of Pollock Pines on Highway 50. Heading east, turn left at Mill Run. Call for current days and hours: (530) 644-2349.

**Pick up permit for East side entry at the:**

**Taylor Creek Forest Service Visitor Center**, located three miles north of the Highway 50/89 junction at South Lake Tahoe, on Highway 89. Open summer only. Call for hours, phone: (530) 543-2674.

**Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit**, located 2 miles east of the Highway 50/89 junction in South Lake Tahoe. Turn right on Al Tahoe Blvd., then right at the first signal. 35 College Drive, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150. Phone (530) 543-2600.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



## Important Information

- ❖ Reservations for Desolation Overnight Permits are available through the National Recreation Reservation Service (NRRS) at [Recreation.gov](http://Recreation.gov) or 1-877-444-6777.
- ❖ Reserved permits can be printed at home or picked up at a Forest Service office within 14 days prior to date of entry. **A signed copy of your permit must be in your possession.**

## Reservations

*Overnight permits can be reserved up to 6 months in advance through [Recreation.gov](http://Recreation.gov) or 1-877-444-6777.*

Due to limited zone quotas, reservations for overnight permits are strongly encouraged during the quota season, especially for holidays and weekends.

**Tip:** When making a reservation, please have a first-night destination in mind as well as a second choice. Although 12 people per party is the maximum allowed in the wilderness, many zones cannot accommodate that large of a group. Refer to the zone quota list on the map for quota numbers and plan accordingly.

### To Reserve Permits:

- **Online:** Log on to [Recreation.gov](http://Recreation.gov) and enter "Desolation Wilderness" into the search field. Click on Desolation Wilderness Permits to reserve a permit up to 6 months in advance.
- **By phone:** Call 1-877-444-6777 to reserve a permit for your stay in Desolation Wilderness. Only credit cards are accepted with this method; please have your credit card ready.
- **In Person:** Visit one of the permit offices listed to secure a permit. Offices will not take reservations over the phone, by mail or by fax, as they had in the past.

**Payment:** Credit (Visa, MasterCard, Discover or American Express) or debit cards are accepted online, by phone, and in-person. Payment by cash, check or money order is accepted in-person at Forest Service offices. Make checks or money orders payable to NRRS.

**Note:** A person can only be responsible for one permit. If you are making plans for several groups, the other permits will need to be in another person's name. Permits can only be issued to the group leader of designated alternate.

## Reservation and Camping Fees

Fee revenues pay for wilderness ranger patrol, trail maintenance, signing, site restoration, and wilderness education projects.

### Fee Schedule:

- **Reservation Fee:** \$6 per party/permit (non-refundable). **Permit fees are paid at time of reservation.** Plan carefully before making your reservation.
- **Overnight Wilderness Permit Fee:** \$5/person for one night, \$10/person for 2 to 14 nights. The cost of a single permit will not exceed \$100. Children 12 and under are free. Permit fees may be refunded if changes or cancellation is done more than 14 days in advance of date of entry. All fees are non-refundable within 14 days or less of date of entry.
  - **Pre-Paid Fee Card:** \$20 for an annual pre-paid fee card. The card covers only the overnight permit fee for cardholder and is valid for one year from date of purchase. You still must obtain a permit, subject to quota limits, and pay any reservation fee. Because a wilderness permit is a special use authorization, Interagency Passes do not apply.
- **Service Charge: \$5.00** for a change to the date or for adding people. Additional permit fees may apply. No fee for cancellations. Changes to reserved permits can be made online, through the call center, or in person.
- **Trailhead Day Use Fee:** Currently applies to Eagle Falls and Pyramid Creek parking areas only. A daily Trailhead Day Use pass is \$5 per vehicle per day. (This fee is waived for overnight permit holders. **Be sure to obtain or print your parking pass and properly display in your vehicle.** The Pass does not guarantee parking will be available.)
  - A \$20.00 **Annual Day Use Pass** is available, valid at the facilities listed below where a parking fee is required. This Pass is valid for one year from date of purchase. Facilities include: Eagle Falls, Pyramid Creek, Carson Pass, Meiss, and Woods Lake Trailheads. Also covers day use fees at the Dru Barber Campground. (Parking at the Carson Pass and Meiss Parking areas is limited to June 1 to October 1st due to their operation as a State Snow Park during the winter months.)
  - **Interagency Annual, Senior, and Access passes** allow the holder to park at the above listed facilities for free. Interagency Passes do not apply to the Wilderness permit or purchase of the Fee Card or Parking Pass.

**Apply for Entry by selecting the zone of your first night's destination.**

Zone #	Zone Name	Total Daily Quota	Reservable Quota
1	Rockbound Lake	25	18
2	General Creek	10	7
3	Genevieve	20	14
4	Grouse Lakes	2	2
5	Brown Mountain	8	6
6	Rubicon Reservoir	23	16
7	Stony Ridge	20	14
8	Tells	11	8
9	Highland	8	6
10	Lelands	19	13
11	Camper Flat	20	14
12	Phipps	4	2
13	Lakes #3 and #5	8	6
14	Schmidell	10	7
15	Dick's Peak	4	2
16	Middle Velma	20	14
17	Lower Velmas	40	28
18	Eagle	6	4
19	Lawrence	8	6
20	Red Peak	6	4
21	Lois	8	6
22	China Flat	12	8
23	Dick's	16	11
24	Kalmia	6	4
25	Maud	12	8
26	Rockbound Pass	6	4
27	Mt. Price	12	8
28	Half Moon	5	3
29	Gilmore	18	13
30	Cathedral	4	2
31	Tyler	8	6
32	Twin	20	14
33	Aloha	36	25
34	Susie	8	6
35	Grass	8	6
36	Hemlock	12	8
37	Smith	5	3
38	Waca	5	3
39	American	10	7
40	Lake of the Woods	20	14
41	Tamarack	20	14
42	Triangle	2	2
43	Lyons	15	10
44	Avalanche	20	14
45	Ralston	4	2

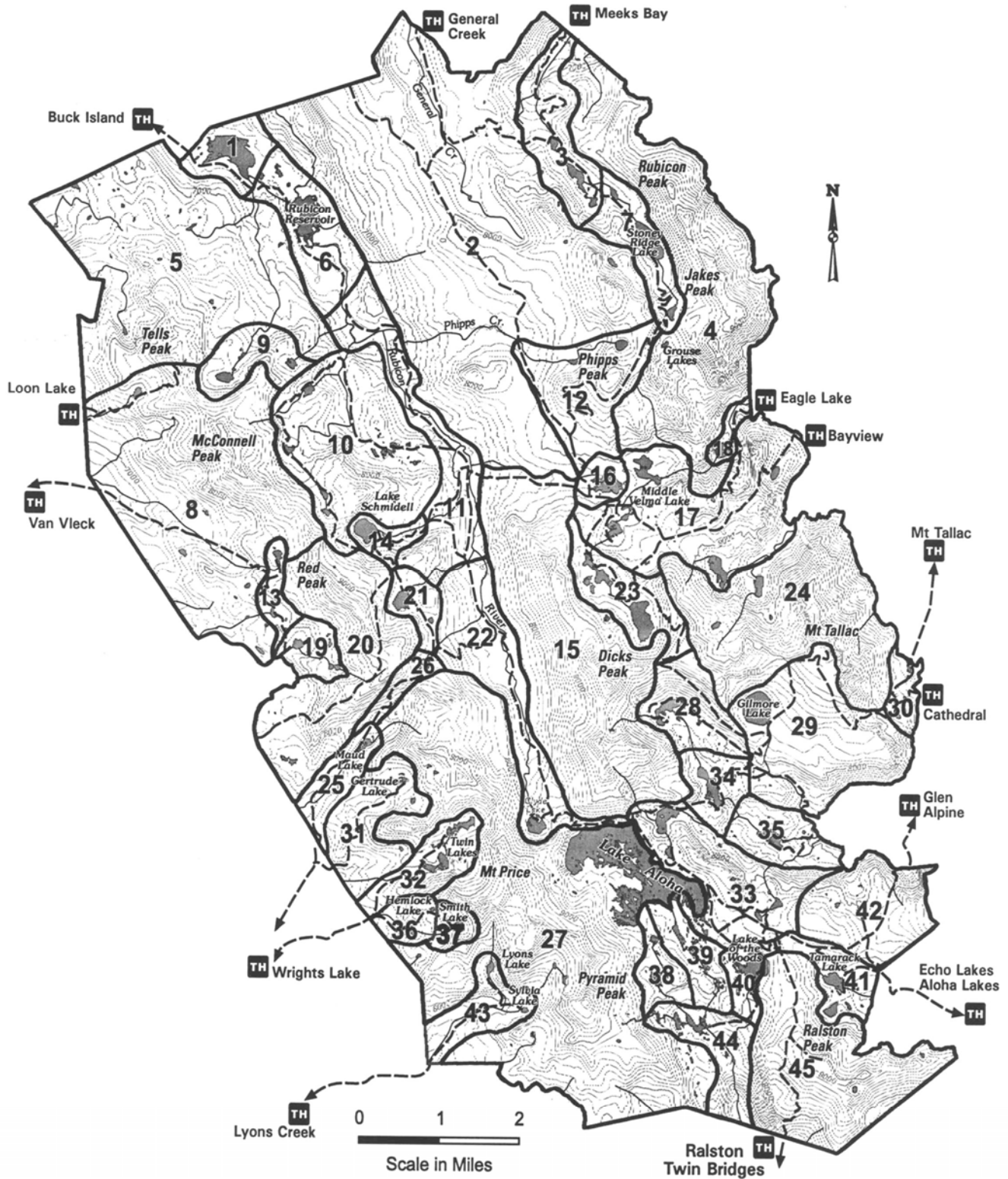
## Trip Planning Tips

- Plan your trip based on the person in your group that has the least skills, physical conditioning, or endurance.
- A physically fit hiker can generally hike a mile on an easy/moderate trail in 30 minutes. Double that for children and the less fit members of your group.
- If you are hiking in late in the day or have children or slow hikers in your group, choose one of the edge zones for your first nights stay. You may not make it to an interior zone before dark. Your permit is only legal for the permitted first night zone.
- Although maximum group size is 12 for Desolation Wilderness, many zones have smaller quotas. Plan your trip accordingly. For large groups a non-wilderness dependent experience maybe more appropriate.
- Remember, group size maximum is 12. Splitting into smaller groups to obtain a permit, you may not be able to meet and camp together.
- Expect and plan for snow in May and June. Stream flows will be high and swift during snow melt runoff from May through July. Plan your trip to avoid crossing streams if necessary cross in the morning during lower water flows.
- The elevation in Desolation Wilderness ranges between 7,000 and 10,000 feet. Monitor yourself and members of your group for altitude sickness. Signs and symptoms include headache, nausea, and fatigue. Rest, eat, and drink water. If symptoms persist, retreat to lower elevations.
- Drink at least 2 – 4 quarts of water a day to avoid dehydration.
- Temperatures are cold at night. Bring warm clothes.
- Campsite selection — Camp at least 100-200 feet away from shoreline and 500 feet way from the shoreline in restoration areas. A small number of designated sites are available in the special management areas on a first-come, first-serve basis. Please camp within approximately 30 feet of the marked post. Please choose a durable camping surface.
- Mosquitoes are thickest along lake shores and wet areas. Choose a campsite away from the shoreline or other wet areas, preferably in an area with a little wind.

**70% of the quota is available by reservation.**



# Desolation Wilderness Management Zones



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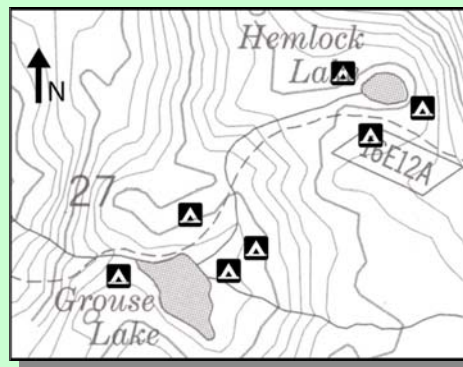
## Restoration Projects and Designated Campsites

*We need your help to protect fragile areas!*

The popularity of some wilderness destinations results in damage to the delicate vegetation around shorelines and meadow areas. Restoration has occurred and campsites have been designated around several heavily impacted lakes to promote the re-vegetation and reduce impacts to these sensitive lakeshore environments. The maps below illustrate the approximate locations of the designated sites.



**Eagle Lake**



**Grouse and Hemlock**



**Lake of the Woods**

\*Specific campsites have been designated within 500 feet of Eagle, Grouse and Hemlock lakes, and the north, south and east side of Lake of the Woods. Designated campsites are marked with a 4 x 4 post with a tent symbol, and are first-come, first-serve only. Camp within 30 feet of the post and only one permitted group per site. If all designated campsites are taken when you arrive, you must camp more than 500 feet from the lakeshore. (36 CFR 261.10 l)

### Wilderness Ethics

Human impacts can degrade and destroy wilderness resources, as well as detract from other visitors' wilderness experience. Many areas in Desolation show dramatic, and sometimes irreversible, signs of heavy or improper use. Late snow melt, short growing seasons, and limited nutrient flow make for slow recovery of Desolation's alpine environment. Due to overcrowding, water quality degradation, destruction of vegetation, soil erosion, and dependence of wildlife on human food, all visitors must share in the responsibility of protecting these unique and fragile resources.

#### Leave No Trace

Please become familiar with and practice **Leave No Trace** skills whenever you travel outdoors, and especially when you visit wilderness areas. Some of the principles of the national Leave No Trace program which apply in Desolation Wilderness are:

- 1) **Plan Ahead and Prepare**
- 2) **Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces**
- 3) **Dispose of Waste Properly**
- 4) **Leave What You Find**
- 5) **Respect Wildlife**
- 6) **Be Considerate of Other Visitors**



### Regulations

Additional considerations or regulations to help minimize impacts include:

- ◆ **\*Group size** is limited to 12 people per group. Note: group size is also dependent on the number of people allowed in the zone.
- ◆ **\*Campfires are prohibited.** Use portable camp stoves only! Check at Ranger Station for stove use restrictions.
- ◆ Stay on trails to reduce erosion and avoid trampling fragile vegetation next to the trail.
- ◆ Make camps at least 100' (50 paces) and do all washing at least 200' (100 paces) from all water sources or trails.
- ◆ **\*Pack out your trash** and any other litter that you see.
- ◆ **\*Bury human and canine waste** six to eight inches deep at least 200' (100 paces) from lakes, streams, campsites, and trails. Pack out your used toilet paper.
- ◆ **\*Dogs** should be on leash and controlled at all times. Be considerate to other visitors and protect wildlife.
- ◆ **\*Stock:** \*Recreational livestock is limited to 2 stock per person with a maximum of 12 per party. Stock must be held or confined more than 100' from other campsites and more than 200' from lakes and streams. Do not tie stock to trees. Users are to scatter manure at least 100 feet from campsites and water, and fill in any holes created by livestock.
- ◆ Use weed-free feed.

(\*Violators are subject to fines.)

*The land which became Desolation Wilderness was part of the Lake Tahoe Forest Reserve, established in 1899. In 1910, when the first tourists were beginning to make their way over the narrow dirt roads of Echo and Donner summits, the area was made part of the newly-formed Eldorado National Forest. The area was named the Desolation Valley Primitive Area in 1931, and in 1969 Desolation Wilderness was Congressionally designated and included in the National Wilderness Preservation System. This unique area now totals 63,960 acres of wilderness land which is ours to enjoy, protect, and care for. Enjoy your visit and be sure to Leave No Trace so that future generations may return to enjoy its permanent yet changing beauty.*



The Wilderness Act of 1964 states that Wilderness is to be "protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and [is an area] which...has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation".

As a visitor to Desolation Wilderness, you have the opportunity to experience solitude and nature in its most wild state, to enjoy spectacular scenery, and to hike, cross-country ski, ride horseback, or enjoy other outdoor activities. These attractions and easy access from urban areas draw thousands of people to this Wilderness each year.

The Desolation Wilderness is managed according to the Wilderness Act of 1964 to "ensure an enduring resource of Wilderness for present and future generations." The wilderness character of the Desolation and its unique values of solitude, physical and mental challenge, scientific study, inspiration and primitive recreation will be protected, and where necessary, restored. Natural ecological conditions will be preserved under a concept of non-degradation, to prevent further loss of naturalness or solitude.

Detailed information may be found in the Desolation Wilderness Management Guidelines and Land Management Plan Amendment.



**For information on the Desolation, other wilderness areas or minimum impact camping, contact:**

**Pacific Ranger Station: Eldorado National Forest**

Located 22 miles east of Placerville on Highway 50.  
7887 Highway 50, Pollock Pines, CA 95726  
Heading east, turn left at Mill Run road.  
Phone: (530) 644-2349 for current days and hours.

**Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit**

Located two miles east of the Highway 50/89 junction in South Lake Tahoe on Highway 50. From highway turn right on Al Tahoe Blvd and then turn right at first signal. 35 College Drive, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150.  
Phone for hours: (530) 543-2600